

China: Why not—why not release Mr. Wei Jingsheng.

WEI JINGSHENG

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, I rise today to call for the immediate release of Wei Jingsheng, China's most prominent political prisoner.

Wei Jingsheng is no stranger to harsh unjust treatment. He has spent all but 6 months of the last 18 years in prisons or in labor camps, often in solitary confinement. Now serving his second sentence of 14 years for the crime of peacefully advocating democracy and human rights, Wei Jingsheng is terribly ill. His expected release date is 12 years from now—the year 2009—and that is assuming he lives that long.

At 46 years of age, Wei suffers from life-threatening heart disease, he cannot lift his head, and he complains of severe back pain. His requests for medical attention have gone unfulfilled and all indications are that he has not seen a doctor in more than a year.

A former electrician at the Beijing Zoo, Wei has been one of the strongest voices of China's democratic movement. In recognition of his efforts, Wei was named the 1994 Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award laureate and, every year since 1995, Members of Congress have nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize.

While in prison serving his first sentence, Wei was allowed to write letters on certain topics to his family, prison authorities, and China's leaders. Because most of these letters urged democratic reforms, they were seized by authorities and never sent. Wei was later able to retrieve them and release them publicly, and they have now been translated and published as a book. Today, May 13, is the publication date of this book, "The Courage To Stand Alone: Letters From Prison and Other Writings." This book states what is obvious to Wei and should be clear to Americans: China needs democratic freedoms. Unfortunately, China's leaders continue to show a flagrant disregard for human rights.

In 1994, over the strenuous objections of those of us concerned over China's atrocious and repeated violations of international standards of human rights, the administration delinked granting of most-favored-nation trade status to China to improvements in its human rights record. The administration argued then that through constructive engagement on economic matters, and dialog on other issues, including human rights, the United States could better influence Chinese behavior. That was a mistake.

Let those who support constructive engagement visit the terribly ill Wei Jingsheng in his prison cell, and ask him if developing markets for toothpaste or breakfast cereal will help him win his freedom or save his life. I do not see how closer economic ties alone will somehow transform China's authoritarian system into a more demo-

cratic one. Unless we press the case for improvement in China's human rights record, using the leverage afforded us by the Chinese Government's desire to expand its economy and increase trade with us, I do not see how conditions will get much better.

In fact, the harsh prison conditions and lack of medical attention provided to Mr. Wei demonstrate that, after nearly 4 years, dialog and constructive engagement have made no impact on Chinese behavior. We should make it clear that human rights are of real—as opposed to rhetorical—concern to this country. Until Wei Jingsheng and others committed to reform in China are allowed to speak their voices freely and work for change, American-Chinese relations should not be based on a business-as-usual basis. I hope the administration will do everything possible to demand the immediate release of Wei Jingsheng and urge Chinese authorities to provide him with access to medical care that he urgently requires.

CALLING FOR THE IMMEDIATE RELEASE OF WEI JINGSHENG

Mr. D'AMATO. Mr. President, I rise today to call for the release of Wei Jingsheng who has been imprisoned for almost 18 years under the harshest of circumstances in China. Mr. Wei was first jailed in 1979 for advocating democratic reform in China. Can you imagine? The free exchange of such ideas which we take for granted every day in the United States cost Mr. Wei his freedom.

Mr. Wei was released in 1993 in an act which curiously coincided with an upcoming vote by the International Olympic Committee on China's application to host the Olympic games in the year 2000. China's bid for the Olympic games was unsuccessful and shortly thereafter Mr. Wei was imprisoned again. He is not scheduled for release until 2009. This overtly politically motivated move is unconscionable.

Through these years of personal terror Mr. Wei has frequently been held in solitary confinement. He was been the victim of cruelty and mistreatment which had a serious effect on Mr. Wei's health. I am told that Mr. Wei is suffering from heart disease but does not have access to proper medical care. This treatment is simply wrong.

The People's Republic of China wants to assume the status of a responsible nation in the world community. And yet they continue to subjugate the people of Tibet. As a case in point, I spoke earlier this year on the floor about Ngawang Choephel, a former Fulbright scholar at Middlebury College and a friend of the United States, who is serving an 18-year prison term for supposed espionage activities.

The People's Republic of China wants to assume the status of a responsible nation in the world community. And yet they continue to subjugate their own people as well. Mr. Wei is a case in point. The State Department in its an-

nual human rights record for 1996 hit the nail on the head. It said that China "continued to commit widespread and well-documented human rights abuses, in violation of internationally accepted norms, stemming from the authorities' intolerance of dissent, fear of unrest, and the absence or inadequacy of laws protecting basic freedoms."

Mr. President, Mr. Wei has suffered enough. The people of Tibet have suffered enough. The people of China have suffered enough. It is time for a change. We must work for that change in areas we can influence. And let's start by calling for the release of Mr. Wei.

THE UNJUST IMPRISONMENT OF WEI JINGSHENG

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, today it is my unhappy duty to note the continued imprisonment of Wei Jingsheng by the Government of China. In an attempt to silence his bold voice for democracy, Mr. Wei has been jailed in solitary confinement or forced to work in a labor camp for all but 6 months of the past 18 years. As a result of his mistreatment, he suffers from a life-threatening heart condition and cannot lift his head due to a neck injury. Today I join my colleagues to call for his immediate and unconditional release, and urge the Government of China to provide him with medical attention.

Mr. Wei's commitment to democracy and freedom despite such mistreatment is a testament to the strength of the human spirit and the power that words hold over the human soul. He was first jailed in 1978 after founding an independent magazine and daring to call for democracy. Despite the hard conditions of prison life, Mr. Wei refused to abandon his beliefs. Over the next decade, he wrote many letters—some to his family telling of his daily life, others to the leaders of his nation urging them to take immediate steps toward democracy. Virtually all were confiscated by prison authorities and never sent. Released as a result of international pressure in 1993, Mr. Wei immediately resumed his advocacy of democracy despite all that he had suffered. Within 6 months he was sentenced to another 14 years in prison. Today Chinese officials consider his writings so threatening that he is constantly monitored by criminal inmates whose job it is to ensure that he puts no words down on paper.

Despite these measures, Mr. Wei's words have echoed throughout China and the world. In 1989, demands for his release helped to stir the demonstration in Tiananmen Square. He also has been honored with the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award, the Sakharov Prize for Freedom, and been nominated many times for the Nobel Prize for Peace.

I am confident that the Chinese Government's attempts to silence Mr. Wei will not succeed. Mr. Wei's letters,